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FOR INFORMATION

FOLLOW-UP TO THE DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL AT ITS SUBSTANTIVE SESSION OF 1996

SUMMARY

The present report continues the process of informing the Executive Board of the principal issues related to conclusions and follow-up of decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council, in particular at its 1996 substantive session. Specifically, it responds to Council resolution 1996/42 of 25 July 1996, which addresses progress on implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 of 20 December 1995, and Council resolution 1996/43 of 25 July 1996 on cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions.

* E/ICEF/1997/2.

INTRODUCTION

1. At its third regular session of 1996, the Executive Board decided to include in its 1997 programme of work the follow-up to decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council (E/ICEF/1996/12/Rev.1, decision 1996/36).

2. The present report begins the process of informing the Board of the principal issues related to conclusions and follow-up of the Council's 1996 substantive session. Since it was prepared only 10 weeks after the close of the session, it is necessarily just a first step. Many of the issues emanating from the Economic and Social Council will require reflection by the UNICEF secretariat, consultation and collaboration with the United Nations Secretariat and inter-agency partners, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the regional banks, as well as follow-up action on a multi-agency basis and over an extended period. The Executive Board will revert to these issues at its second regular session in 1997 when it will discuss the annual report to the Economic and Social Council. The latter report will again be prepared in collaboration with the secretariats of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in accordance with an agreed common format as established in Executive Board decision 1995/5 (E/ICE/1995/9/Rev.1).

3. This report responds to Council resolution 1996/42 of 25 July 1996 which addresses progress on implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 of 20 December 1995, in particular harmonization of budget presentations, the common manual, common premises and monitoring and evaluation.

4. This report also responds to Council resolution 1996/43 of 25 July 1996 which emphasizes that the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions should expand, whenever appropriate, their collaboration in co-financing of field programmes and projects and continue to explore innovative ways to combine and maximize their resources in support of field-level development activities.

5. The progress report on follow-up to Council resolution 1996/33 of 22 July 1996, which urges governing bodies of relevant agencies to complete their follow up to Council resolution 1995/56 in good time, can be found in document E/ICEF/1997/5. Therefore, the Board may wish to address follow-up to resolution 1996/33 under the agenda item relating to emergencies.

I. OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

A. Harmonization of programmes and procedures

6. Subsequent to the policy decision by the executive heads of the members of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) in December 1995 to proceed with the Common Country Assessment, which was communicated to all field representatives as a joint letter, UNICEF joined with UNDP, UNFPA, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and WFP in preparing guidelines for preparation of the Assessment. Defined as a process of collaboratively collecting and analysing basic data and information in order to understand a country situation, the Assessment is a powerful tool for the analysis of a country's needs and represents an important instrument for monitoring progress and results achieved in development activities. Draft operational guidelines, setting out the content and scope of the Assessment, the process for its

preparation and review, steps for its implementation and reporting procedures, were sent to all UNICEF field offices in November 1996 with a request for feedback. With the responses from field offices and the involvement of field-based staff, final guidelines and determination of a common set of indicators or criteria are due for transmittal in March 1997.

7. As of March 1996, 27 countries had fully harmonized programming cycles; in 54 more, harmonization will occur by 1999; and in a further 26 countries, harmonization is possible at some point in the future. Eight countries are considered special cases where harmonization is unlikely in the short- to medium-term. Thus, by their next programming cycle, over 90 per cent of country programmes will be harmonized among the JCGP members.

8. With respect to harmonization of procedures, a common letter of guidance on payment to government staff, signed by the heads of UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and WFP, has been sent to all field offices. This communication included detailed guidelines for implementation.

B. Harmonization of budget presentations

9. The UNICEF Comptroller presented an oral progress report on budget harmonization by UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA to the Executive Board at its third regular session of 1996, as requested by the Board in decision 1996/16. Since then, collaboration has continued and progress has been achieved, taking into account the request of the Economic and Social Council to finalize the work in time for a final decision to be made by the respective Executive Boards in advance of the biennium 1998-1999. The Board will review the final product (E/ICEF/1997/AB/L.3), together with the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (E/ICEF/1997/AB/L.6), at the present session.

C. Common manual

10. The Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) has completed preparations of its Operational Activities Reference Manual. This new publication responds to the growing demand among United Nations system headquarters, regional and field staff for a compilation of the key legislation, guidelines and administrative arrangements agreed or recognized by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) for the delivery of United Nations system operational activities. The manual will serve as a system-wide complement to other documentation produced by individual funds, programmes and agencies. The format of the manual seeks flexibility and user-friendliness, using a loose-leaf binder with ample provision for updates and additional material.

11. The manual includes the following main topics:

(a) The programme approach;

(b) Monitoring and evaluation in the context of the programme approach;

(c) Country strategy note: basic principles and procedures;

(d) National execution and implementation arrangements;

(e) Decentralization of capacities and authority;

(f) Common Country Assessment;

(g) The resident coordinator system, including role and functioning, criteria for selection, annual reports and UNDP financial support for resident coordinators;

(h) Training;

(i) Programme coordination, including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Operations Centre (UNOPS), United Nations Volunteers, follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development and drug abuse control;

(j) General Assembly resolutions 50/120 of 20 December 1995, 47/199 of 22 December 1992 and 44/211 of 22 December 1989;

(k) The United Nations system.

12. UNICEF distributed copies of the manual to all field offices and key headquarters personnel in mid-November 1996, requesting feedback and comments for further updates. Making the texts available in other languages will be explored by CCPOQ, as will the feasibility of creating an Internet home page for the manual.

D. Common premises and administrative services

13. An informal session was conducted during the Economic and Social Council's 1996 operational segment in order to brief delegates on the status of common premises and services and apprise them of substantive issues pending clarification, including ownership, rental options, apportioning of operating costs and common service charges, and future common premises sites. The JCGP subgroup on common premises will be hiring a management unit comprising two Professional staff to work with UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, initially for a one-year period, to deal with project management, defining roles and levels of reporting responsibility, conducting cost-benefit analyses of potential common premises projects and shared services, and examining other issues related to the JCGP framework.

E. Monitoring and evaluation

14. UNICEF collaborated with its partners in the JCGP Working Group on Evaluation and Monitoring to produce common guidelines on evaluation focusing on project evaluation policies, concepts, terminology and products; and monitoring products for both projects and country programmes. These were sent to all UNICEF field offices in late 1996 and will be used and applied throughout the organization. This should ensure closer coordination and collaboration on evaluations at field level.

15. The evaluation offices of the funds and programmes work closely together through an ongoing dialogue and exchange of information in such areas as database development, training and common manuals. In mid-November 1996, a meeting of the Inter-agency Working Group on Evaluation, an informal gathering of the heads of all United Nations system evaluation offices, discussed common policies and harmonization of evaluation capacities. Follow-up to the common guidelines was also discussed, as well as the promotion of joint evaluations among JCGP members at field level, in compliance with recommendations of the Economic and Social Council.

II. COLLABORATION WITH THE BRETTON WOODS INSTITUTIONS

A. Collaboration at global level

16. During its high-level segment on operational activities of the United Nations for international cooperation, the Economic and Social Council discussed collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions and adopted resolution 1996/43, on strengthening collaboration between the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions. In the resolution, the Council, inter alia, and of particular interest to UNICEF, suggests that strengthened collaboration requires an integrated approach encompassing a closer dialogue at the intergovernmental level; elaborated on relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/227; encouraged strengthening of existing mechanisms and exploring new mechanisms of cooperation between the Bretton Woods institutions and United Nations bodies; stressed collaboration on the basis of country-driven activities; emphasized that the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions should expand collaboration in co-financing of field programmes and projects; stressed the need to take into account the exchange of experiences and lessons learned; and stressed that staff exchanges and information sharing, in particular on evaluation methodologies and results, should be encouraged in the course of work.

17. The Council's resolution serves to reaffirm the general directions already provided by the Executive Board and to support ongoing UNICEF initiatives. In the Executive Director's annual report to the Economic and Social Council (E/ICEF/1996/10 (Part II)), the Board received a complete overview of the relationship between UNICEF and the World Bank, including collaboration in policy matters and in operational activities at country level. The report concluded that there is considerable potential for enhanced collaboration with the World Bank. It also stated that policy dialogue, joint programme missions, collaborative programme development and implementation, joint working groups and participation in consultative groups should continue and intensify within a relationship of mutual respect and partnership. This process continues.

18. Together with the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, UNICEF participated in a United Nations senior officials' working group on strengthening collaboration between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions. This group focused its attention on countries facing special circumstances; the exchange of information and data in key areas for policy analysis; the exchange of information on planned research and policy studies on key development issues, with special emphasis on environment and sustainable development; and strengthening country-level collaboration and policy coordination. Its conclusions and recommendations highlighted the need for

(a) Cooperation and coordination on emergency early warning systems;

(b) Closer coordination during emergency situations and in post-conflict recovery activities;

(c) The possible nomination of task managers within the United Nations system to pursue coordination with the Bretton Woods institutions in areas not covered by the inter-agency task forces on follow-up to international conferences;

(d) Establishment of a research and policy studies information exchange mechanism within the framework of ACC;

(e) Better and more constant communication between headquarters coordinating mechanisms and their equivalents in the field;

(f) The possibility of a general agreement between the United Nations system as a whole and the Bretton Woods institutions covering general guidelines for cooperation;

(g) Active joint participation at the outset in developing country-level sectoral plans, programmes and projects;

(h) Country-level policy dialogues and increased information sharing;

(i) Participation of the Bretton Woods institutions in the country strategy note process;

(j) Greater compatibility in procedures, rules and regulations.

These points provide the basis for further collaborative follow-up within the framework of the senior officials' group.

B. Collaboration at field level

19. With the World Bank and UNICEF participating in all three of the inter-agency task forces following up on recent international conferences, the partnership has been replicated through system-wide, inter-agency coordination at the field level. Thematic groups, mirroring and building on those established at the ACC level, have already been established in China, Egypt, El Salvador, Haiti, India, Kazakstan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Nigeria and Turkey. Through these new structures, the World Bank and UNICEF are working within system-wide groups at the country level to carry out programme planning and development for, inter alia, the basic social services sectors, water and sanitation and gender issues.

20. In Africa, collaboration between UNICEF and the World Bank is proceeding on a country-by-country basis with an agreed consensus on the importance of poverty reduction, human resources development, HIV/AIDS, health systems reform and community-based education systems. UNICEF is active in the design of many of the Bank's recent sector investment programmes. The Bank and UNICEF are working together with UNDP on poverty monitoring as part of an overall priority on country-level poverty analysis and analytical capacity. Joint collaborative health sector reform has been pursued in Mali, Uganda and Zambia. The World Bank and UNICEF have developed essential drugs programmes in Burkina Faso and the United Republic of Tanzania. There is joint collaboration on early childhood development programmes in Kenya and Uganda. In the education sector, the Bank and UNICEF are collaborating in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali and Uganda. The Bank and UNICEF, with participation from other United Nations entities, are carrying out public expenditure reviews in several countries, including Ethiopia, Uganda and Zambia. Much of the joint work by UNICEF and the Bank in Africa now falls within the framework of activities included in the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa, a relationship which is compatible with the sectoral investment process, and will improve accountability and strengthen field-level collaboration.

21. The notable feature of UNICEF collaboration with the World Bank in the Americas is the community-managed social services approach to the provision of urban basic services. Pioneered through a $70 million Bank-funded programme in Guatemala, the modalities developed are being adapted to a basic services programme in Venezuela. It is expected that the approach will soon be extended to other programmes in the region. In Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States, the World Bank is supporting a UNICEF/International Child Development Centre programme for poverty and social monitoring in these transitional economies.

22. An April 1996 meeting between UNICEF and World Bank country representatives and technical staff in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, to discuss programmes and programming in the education and health sector within the context of the Special Initiative on Africa, led to a follow-up meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, on 14-15 November 1996. The latest meeting aimed to exchange information on collaboration in the region and at country levels; identify generic and specific areas for extending collaboration in social development and poverty reduction, particularly in the sectors of health and basic education; agree on specific follow-up actions; and develop closer contacts between UNICEF and Bank staff. A similar meeting is proposed for the West and Central Africa region.

23. A UNICEF/World Bank water and environmental sanitation meeting was also held in Nairobi in early November. Following discussions on programmes and operations, and not precluding joint activities in other countries of the region, five countries were identified for intensified collaboration: Ethiopia, Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique and Uganda. A note of consensus was agreed between the two parties calling for specific collaboration and coordinated action in support of Governments in the following areas: supporting national development frameworks; developing sectoral strategies and plans leading to identification of programmes; piloting innovative strategies; capacity-building; information exchange; regular coordination meetings; and support for programme implementation and operation. Specific arrangements will be made at the country level, where appropriate, between Governments, UNICEF and the World Bank.

24. Although UNICEF field offices will formulate country-specific collaboration strategies, with policy and technical support from the regional offices and New York headquarters, the areas of greatest future potential include: improved information exchange, joint analysis and research and policy dialogue; UNICEF participation in Bank-financed studies or surveys; the consultative group process; preparation and implementation of sectoral investment programmes and/or projects; and World Bank utilization of UNICEF procurement services. While programme collaboration is generally well advanced, the Bank and UNICEF are now focusing on developing standard administrative and financial arrangements to help field offices to develop modalities.

25. UNICEF will continue to report to the Executive Board periodically on collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions under an appropriate agenda item.